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AN IDEAL COURSE IN HISTORY FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

It is happily no longer necessary to adduce arguments to prove that history is the peer of any subject, both in informational and educational value. This is now generally conceded. And substantial agreement has also been reached regarding the best methods of instruction. But opinions still differ not a little as to what constitutes an ideal course of historical study.

It may be well, before entering upon a discussion of the unsettled problems connected with this question, to enumerate briefly the points which may now be regarded as settled. These are, it is believed, somewhat as follows:

1. That historical study should be continuous during the last four, and preferably six years, of the elementary school.
2. That in an ideal curriculum at least three exercises per week should be devoted to history throughout the secondary school.
3. That the history of Greece and Rome should be taught, because of their contributions to the modern world, and the striking simplicity and power of their leading personalities and forces.
4. That the history of England should be included because of its intimate connection with American history, and because the world is indebted to England for constitutional government and the modern system of industry.
5. That for many and obvious reasons a thorough study of American history and civics should be made in the last year of the course.

The chief matter still under discussion is the advisability of teaching general history. The Madison Conference cast its commanding influence for the substitution of French or German history, and this proposal has been approved by the New England

and New York conferences. Yet expressions of radical dissent are heard, both from the rank and file of high-school teachers, and from recognized leaders of educational opinion. Thus Professor Salmon in a recent article, entitled "Unity in College Entrance History," makes a strong plea for the retention of general history. Professor Hudson, representing the University of Michigan, has urged that general history be given in preference, if need be, to English history. And even President Adams, who was chairman of the Madison Conference, declares in the introduction to his *Manual of Historical Literature*, in most felicitous and emphatic words, that a general outline of the subject should be secured before proceeding to the detailed study of special nations or epochs.

The reason usually assigned for this proposed substitution is the difficulty of teaching general history successfully. It is apt to fall into the Scylla of mere routine memorizing, or, if this be avoided, into the Charybdis of vague and meaningless generalities. This is a real difficulty, but experience shows that it is not insuperable. It is no uncommon thing to hear teachers maintain that their pupils grow in intellectual stature through the study of general history more than through any other one subject, and this is frequently corroborated by the pupils themselves. Moreover, this objection lies with even greater force against the history of separate nations. No secondary teacher who has ever tried both plans needs to be told that national history offers tenfold greater facilities for the application of the old-time memoriter method, and that the temptation to be content with mechanical memorizing and repetition of facts and dates is therefore proportionately greater than in the topical study of general history. This is so obvious that it may fairly be regarded as self-evident.

A more important reason for the opposition to general history is suggested by the following passage in the report of the Madison Conference: "Fortunately, the subject of history, like that of natural science, is one in which the educational advantages may be obtained without covering the whole field." This

indicates that the discarding of general history is a part and a result of the attempt to transfer attention and emphasis from the informational to the disciplinary side of the subject, the assumption being that the very incompleteness of the knowledge thus attained will tend to concentrate attention on the educational effect of the exercise. But however desirable this object may be, it is, at least, open to question whether the means adopted will not injure rather than promote the cause of historical study.

In the first place, can we afford to have people and pupils feel that the knowledge acquired in the study of history is a matter of no moment? Is not the attitude of the public towards purely formal studies, which are ridiculed as mere "intellectual gymnastics," a sufficient warning of the dangers inherent in this procedure? Moreover, waiving this question of expediency, is it true that the informational value of history can be safely neglected? Are we justified in sending pupils out into life with an imperfect and distorted conception of what has actually happened in the world, and, consequently, of the forces which are operative in the present and destined to control the future?

In order to break the force of this objection, it is suggested that French or German history be "so taught as to elucidate the general movement of mediæval and modern history." If this could really be done, there would be little room for controversy. But is it psychologically possible? Is it not rather in conflict with the precepts of sound pedagogy, no less than the teachings of experience?

Let us consider a moment just what is involved in this proposal.

Less than a generation ago, history was either not taught at all in American colleges, or was taught as a side issue by some overworked professor in another department. The marvelous change which we see today is due, above all, to one cause: the doctrine of the unity of history; that is, of a progressive development pervading the entire course of human events. In the words of Professor Sloane: "The doctrine of the unity of his-

tory has been so emphasized that the consequences are simply revolutionary. . . . To accept the doctrine of unity is to admit that no country is more than one wheel in the series which moves the hands on the dial plate of human progress. . . . We no longer study nations, but epochs. . . . We have found the movement of the race more majestic than that of nations or individuals." And President Adams says: "The history of civilization is one continuous story of development. . . . Before this fact all artificial distinctions between different periods of history and different kinds of history fade away."

Now it is precisely this fundamental doctrine of unity which is ignored in the new programme. One wheel—to retain Professor Sloane's metaphor—is to be substituted for the whole series; the study of separate nations is to displace that of human development; and the artificial distinctions between different kinds of history are to be restored. Could anything be more reactionary? The old text-books in logic used to cite the case of a man who carried about a single brick as a sample of the house which he wished to sell; is not this a fallacy of exactly the same kind? In both cases the logical error consists in the substitution of a part for the whole, forgetful of the fact that the whole contains something different from and superior to any or all of the parts. Outside of mathematics it is seldom true that the sum of the parts is equal to the whole. For this reason a pupil might study in succession each of the great nations, and yet at the end of his course, on account of the artificial separations and groupings thus occasioned, be unable to form any correct conception of the general movement of history. Something very like this actually happened in the case of a boy of unusual ability who had studied both French and English history, but was unable to grasp them in their relations to each other or to the rest of the world until he studied general history; then he declared that it seemed as though the sun broke through the fog, and he saw in their true relations things which before had been confused and distorted.

It would seem, therefore, from this point of view, to be almost a truism that the only way of really "elucidating the general movement of history" is to study the general movement of history, not as a mere appendage to the history of France or Germany, but as being *per se* the chief subject of historical study. Any other treatment must fatally obscure the unity and perspective of history, by giving to one nation the prominence which belongs rightfully only to the common achievements of all nations.

In view of this fact, what is to be said of the claim that equal or greater disciplinary results may be obtained from a limited portion of history?

Before answering this question, a distinction must be made between technical and general discipline: the one being best attained by the intensive study of parts, the other by the extensive study of wholes. If the object of historical study be exclusively the mastery of the processes of historical interpretation and criticism, it is perfectly true that the history of some one nation would be preferable to general history. Not only so, but a single period would be better still, and a single document studied intensively month after month would be best of all. But such intensive study presupposes maturity of mind which cannot be expected in secondary schools, and a wide knowledge of the subject as a whole—the very thing it is now proposed to get along without. Moreover, even were this not the case, such technical skill would be relatively useless for all pupils not destined to become scholars by profession. And the chief function of secondary schools is not the training of scholars, but the education of men and citizens. The discipline demanded of history, as of all other subjects, is, therefore, not technical but general. It is that training of the mind and heart which will be most valuable in the most difficult and most neglected of all fine arts—the conduct of one's own life.

If this is true, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the cutting up of history into a number of longitudinal strips, of which the pupil could take only a small part, would diminish

both the informational and the educational value of the subject. Can the interest of the pupils be sustained when they see only snatches, here and there, of the great drama, while the rest goes on behind the scenes? Can they follow with equal certainty the relation of cause and effect, when the one or the other usually lies in regions beyond their gaze? Can their judgment receive a training of equal value when the materials for comparison are largely denied them? Can the moral uplifting and purification, which constitute so large a part of the value of history, take place when the unity of action is destroyed, causing the Nemesis of nations to appear as arbitrary will or blind chance? Finally, can the study produce the deepest and most abiding impressions on mind and character when the pupil sees but dimly, at uncertain intervals, the sublime Procession of the Ages—the slow but absolutely sure and irresistible advance of human progress out of the measureless past even to the present?

To all these questions it would appear that but one answer can be made, and that, an answer not favorable to the elimination of general history from the course.

In the arrangement of courses of study local conditions must be taken into consideration. But, in general, some such arrangement as the following would possess distinct advantages:

Ninth grade, Ancient History, three periods per week.

Tenth grade, Mediæval and Modern History, three periods per week.

Eleventh grade, English History, three to five periods per week.

Twelfth grade, American History and Civics, five periods per week.

No doubt the objection will at once be raised that it is impossible to teach this amount of history and at the same time meet collegiate requirements in other branches. At present this is unfortunately true. But the time is surely at hand when the many who never enter college will no longer be sacrificed to the few who do, or rather to the antiquated requirements which the colleges still maintain. If they cannot be brought to modify these, then so much the worse for the colleges. But there are encouraging signs of progress all along the line. Last fall, Dr. Tetlow nearly secured important action in this direction on the

part of the New England Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools, and we are surely justified in expecting results of the greatest importance from the labors of the National Committee, and the several Advisory Committees, on college entrance requirements. The difficulty is therefore in a fair way to be removed. For the present it may be met in all except the smallest schools by offering college-preparatory pupils the required studies, and at the same time giving to others that training which will best fit them for life. This is not only the chief function of secondary schools but their imperative duty.

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